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ABSTRACT

The great diversity of the student population in California's community colleges and the 1982 cut of \$30 million in the community colleges' budget are forcing colleges to make decisions regarding which courses and programs to eliminate, which students to disenfranchise educationally, and the priorities that should be assigned to courses. In answering these questions, three major criteria should be considered: (1) the value of the course or program to the individual and the community; (2) the cost of the course or program; and (3) the availability of similar instruction elsewhere in the community. If these criteria are applied, the groups that would be educationally disenfranchised, defined in terms of the student prototypes identified by the recently completed California Statewide Longitudinal Study of community college students, would include undisciplined transfers, basic skills students, and vocational students in programs that do not lead to jobs. Decisions about which courses and programs to cut, however, should be made with the aid of as much information as is available by the groups best positioned to make the decisions, that is, by the faculty, administrators, and trustees of the individual colleges, rather than by state-level administrators. (HB)

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During the past summer, two seemingly unrelated events occurred: \$30 million dollars were taken from the California Community Colleges (CCC) budget and the final report of the Statewide Longitudinal Study was published. The report gives findings from 15 community colleges tracking 6,500 students who first enrolled in Fall, 1978. The data were collected by examining college transcripts and by conducting a series of structured interviews. The major finding of the study was that CCCs are caring exceedingly well for the educational needs of many extremely diverse groups. To help describe this diversity, eighteen student prototypes were defined, seven in the Transfer function, five in the Vocational function, and six in the Special Interest function.

Though it was the legislature that decided \$30,000,000 would be taken from the CCC budget and that hobbyist and culture courses would be eliminated, there is no doubt that the California Postsecondary Education Commission (CPEC) and the CCC Board of Governors (BOG) were involved in the decisions. Said another way, though there are 70 CCC districts, each with its own board of trustees and administration, each deriving a substantial portion of its budget from local taxes, and each unique in its demography, ambiance, and student needs, the decisions concerning courses to be offered at all community colleges was made by Sacramento bureaucrats who know little about higher edu-

cation and nothing about the subtleties and complexities of community colleges.

The implicit obligation of the BOG and CPEC is to help the colleges and districts achieve their missions. Though it is defensible for the legislature to withhold state funds from any agency, it is unreasonable to ask state employees who are unfamiliar with the intricacies of community colleges to serve as the source of information for determining the governance of these colleges. Rather than dictating the curricula of colleges, the BOG and the CPEC should help the colleges to develop criteria upon which to make decisions about course deletions and modifications.

Given the diversity of publics served by community colleges and the shrinking budgets, how should colleges determine which courses and programs to eliminate? Which students to educationally disenfranchise? What priorities to assign to courses?

I suggest that the first criterion must be VALUE, value to both the individual and to the community. What is the probability that the students will fulfill their aspirations? Transfer to the University of California? Learn enough to get a job in the area of study? Get a raise or promotion? Learn to operate the new Nikon? To play racquet ball? To build furniture? Will the community benefit from the technical skills learned? Hobbies learned? From having them attend the university? From having them decide what to do with the

rest of their lives?

The second criterion is COST. The more tax money required to offer the course, the less likely the course will survive. This cannot be the first or the only criterion. If it were, community colleges would offer nothing but the least expensive courses, lecture/discussion courses. (Note: vocational courses are more expensive than humanities or general educational courses because they require special equipment, laboratories, and coordination with their subject industries in the community.) If cost were the first criterion, the Registered Nurse program would be the first to go. Though it is among the most expensive, the Registered Nurse program is also among the most valuable to both the graduates of the program and to the community perpetually short of qualified nurses. Further, expensive as it is to educate a nurse at the community college, it is considerably less than at the University.

The third criterion is the availability of like instruction elsewhere in the community. There are many proprietary schools that train beauticians, body-and-fender repairmen, and secretaries. Many regional occupational programs train for jobs in printing, automobile tune-up, and food preparation. But what institution other than the community college offers a course in the cultural history of Los Angeles (or San Diego or San Francisco or Santa Barbara)? If there are edu-

cational needs that are not fulfilled or not available at reasonable cost to the student or the state, should not the community college fill the gap?

To summarize the criteria, for courses to be included in the offerings of the community colleges, they should be of value to the individual or the community, not prohibitively expensive, and not available from other educational facilities at a reasonable cost. If these criteria are applied to the student prototypes defined by the Statewide Longitudinal Study, which of the various publics now served by community colleges would lose their educational franchise?

One group defined by the Study is the Undisciplined Transfers. Typically, these are recent high school graduates whose academic skills are very low. It is not unusual for a significant proportion of a starting transfer group to perform at or below the 8th grade level on English and math tests. All community colleges as with all universities, have a bonehead English course for those freshmen who did not learn composition well enough to perform in their college classes. But community colleges also have pre-bonehead English, and pre-pre-bonehead English (euphemistically known as "Developmental Communication"). Many educationally handicapped students are helped, but few of the severely handicapped will ever make competent college freshmen let alone University juniors -- regardless of the time and

money spent. Though community college do a good job in remediation, the question is this: is remediation for transfer taken by youngsters few of whom will succeed in transferring more important or less important an offering than hobby and culture courses taken by older, high-tax-paying citizens?

A related, but separate group defined by the Study is the Basic Skills students. These are a mixture of recent immigrants wanting to learn or improve their English, and high school graduates who have not learned enough to participate in regular college courses. English for recent immigrants is traditionally taught by adult education teachers -- you remember -- night school. The Master Plan for Higher Education requires that community colleges admit anyone "capable of profiting from the instruction offered." Can non-English-speaking persons profit from the instruction? Can functional illiterates profit from the instruction? Only if we offer special courses for them! And if the CCC mandate is stretched that far, the only standard for admission will be to have stayed alive for eighteen years.

A third Study group that cuts across prototypes is vocational students in programs that do not lead to jobs, or result in semi-skilled jobs that pay little better than minimum wage. How many of the graduates of Airline Cabin Attendants programs get jobs with airlines? None that I know of -- the few that might are sent to a school conducted by the airline that hired them. By contrast, all students

in Animal Health Technology programs get jobs, most working for the veterinarian for whom they interned. After a year, however, few are making more than \$5 or \$6 an hour not a great deal of money after two years of study.

The point is this: vocational curricula that do not lead to jobs, or that result in low-paying jobs are inappropriate for community colleges. Even programs that result in needed employees (such as typists, stenographers, and secretaries) might be assigned a low priority by many community colleges if the training can be accomplished faster and as well for small tuition by an alternate training institution.

All of the above thoughts, questions, and research findings are presented to make two points. The first is that, though educational decisions, as with all management decisions, must be made with incomplete information, the wise administrator will gather as much information as is available before advocating a position. In the instance where all the data are available, a computer will make a better decision than a human being. On the other hand, when an administrator ignores data that are relevant to the problems being adjudicated, the decision that is made is little more than a religious belief. Sometimes each of us must resort to believing, hoping, wishing, thinking, feeling, or praying that a decision is reasonable; will accomplish what is required: and is in the best interests of

everyone. But other times there is evidence -- quantitative, communicable, hard research facts -- that have a bearing of the decision. The administrator who ignores the research is committing an egregious sin.

The second, and more explicit of the two points, is that no person or group, in Sacramento or elsewhere, knowledgeable or not about higher education in California, can make the best decisions for all 107 California community colleges. The best group to make curriculum decisions is the faculty, administration, and trustees of the individual colleges. While I consider it indefensible for any college in the Bay area or the LA basin to offer courses for semi-skilled jobs such as cosmetology or clerk-typist, it may be perfectly appropriate for colleges in Weed, or Blyth, or Redding. If one runs the only game in town, one must be aware of the educational needs of all the people who want to play.

In summary, Dorothy Knoell was right when she advised community colleges to determine the priorities of the various and sundry missions they espouse. Even optimistic projections indicate that there will be fewer dollars each year for the next several years. As a consequence, if community colleges are to maintain the excellence of the instruction that they have provided in the past, fewer publics will be served. Which publics to abandon should be determined by the local colleges not the staffs of the BOG or CPEC. Further, deci-

sions concerning the elimination of courses should be made using the best research data available.

Sheldon is the coordinator of institutional research at Los Angeles Pierce College. This year he is spending a sabbatical leave as a visiting scholar at the University of Southern California.